

CITY OF SAN DIEGO
M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: November 6, 2003

TO: Historical Resources Boardmembers

FROM: Michael Tudury, Senior Planner and Teri Delcamp, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: ITEM 5 - Herbert Kunzel/Robert Mosher House

The Herbert Kunzel/Robert Mosher House proposed for designation was originally scheduled for the July 31, 2003 meeting of the Historical Resources Board (HRB) and was continued to the HRB meeting of October 23, 2003 to afford the applicant additional time to provide a historical report in rebuttal to the proposed third party designation. The item was further continued to the November 21, 2003 HRB meeting so the property owner's attorney could attend the meeting.

Staff received the rebuttal report prepared by historian Larry J. Pierson on October 29, 2003 and has reviewed the report. (See Attachment 2) Staff does not find that any new information or analysis has been submitted to cause staff to modify its original recommendation to designate the Herbert Kunzel/Robert Mosher House under HRB CRITERIA A (Cultural Landscape), B (Historical Person), C (Architecture) and D (Master Architect). The original staff report is included as Attachment 1; the original designation request historical report was previously distributed to Boardmembers for the July 31 HRB meeting.

A summary of Mr. Pierson's rebuttal and staff's recommendations follows:

CRITERION A - Exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's, a community's or a neighborhood's historical, archaeological, cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, landscaping or architectural development.

Mr. Pierson's report states that the five houses do not reflect the modernist Oriental/Craftsman style and that the common natural wood exterior of these houses does not exemplify or reflect special elements of a neighborhood's historical, cultural, aesthetic, landscaping or architectural development, and that staff did not consider the broader community and city in its recommendation.

Staff's position is that, taken as a group, the five houses on the original Hamilton Block (excluding the new residence at the corner of McCall and San Fernando Streets) all exhibit the similar characteristics of the Modernist Craftsman style, employing similar exterior materials of

wood left to weather naturally, and all situated in the same lush landscaping. Together, they embody 90 years of Humanist Modern architecture and constitute a cultural landscape within the neighborhood. This is a similar approach that has been taken in the designation of houses on Zola Street relating to a complex of homes owned by the Forward family members (HRB Sites #360 and #554).

CRITERION B - Is identified with persons or events significant in local, state or national history.

In Mr. Pierson's report, he states that Mr. Kunzel's professional life does not differ from many successful attorneys and CEOs, and that he did not have a significant effect on local, regional or national history.

Staff believes that Mr. Herbert Kunzel's career as president of the Solar Aircraft Company, a company that is emblematic of San Diego's history in aviation, his career at the top of his field as an attorney, and his involvement on many boards of civic organizations (Scripps, UCSD) and as president of the Charles Lee Powell Foundation serve to qualify him as a historical person. Mr. Herbert Kunzel and his wife were the first owners of this residence, employing architect Robert Mosher for its design, and residing there for 44 years.

CRITERION C - Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction or is a valuable example of the use of natural materials or craftsmanship.

Mr. Pierson's report contends that the Kunzel/Moser House is a "ranch style house", that it does not conform to the sloping site, that the use of natural materials is not uncommon, and that these materials are not used in a distinct or innovative way. The report also states that the interior and since-removed furnishings are the most prominent Oriental-style aspect of the house, and that the vegetation and site walls preclude the public's ability to view the house from the street.

Staff's position is that the Kunzel/Mosher residence employs the simplicity, detailing, respect for natural materials and setting that embody the modernist interpretation of the Craftsman/Japanese architecture sought by the Kunzels. In many respects, it is the natural evolution of the on-site original Craftsman/Japanese style Hamilton residence designed by Emmor Brooke Weaver (HRB Site #371). Key to the significance of the structure is the combination of elements and materials, and the craftsmanship apparent in the detailing, that are representative of Mosher's design expertise. Regarding public visibility, the house, while minimally visible to the public from San Geronio Street, is visible from McCall Street. Finally, it should be noted that the HRB does not typically consider designation of the interior of private houses.

CRITERION D - Is representative of a notable work of a master builder, designer, architect, engineer, landscape architect, interior designer, artist or craftsman.

Finally, in Mr. Pierson's report, he states that, although Mr. Mosher's architecture has been recognized, this recognition does not include awards for his single-family dwellings. The report also states that the house was designed in only the fourth year of his career in San Diego, and that it may be more appropriate to designate a house that is being requested for designation by the owner and that was designed later in his career, perhaps after he was elected as a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects.

Mr. Robert Mosher, FAIA Emeritus, in partnership with architect Roy Drew, designed many significant modernist structures, ranging from residences to academic and commercial structures, as well as consulting on the San Diego-Coronado Bridge. Mr. Mosher and his long-standing firm have left an indelible mark of Modernist design throughout San Diego and Mr. Mosher should be considered as a Master Architect. As a structure that employs the simplicity, detailing, respect for natural materials and setting that embody the modernist interpretation of the Craftsman/Japanese architecture the house is representative of Mosher's overall body of work.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Herbert Kunzel/Robert Mosher House under HRB CRITERIA A (Cultural Landscape), B (Historical Person), C (Architecture) and D (Master Architect).

Michael Tudury
Senior Planner/Architect

Teri Delcamp
Senior Planner/Historian

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Attachments: 1. Staff Report P-03-190, dated July 17, 2003
2. *The Results of a Historic Evaluation for the Cohn Residence*, Brian F. Smith and Associates, October 2003